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“Smoke Alarms Are Not Enough”

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Hello, my name is Kim Schroeder. I am a Fire & Life Safety Educator representing the Washington Public Fire Educators, a section of the Washington Fire Chiefs. I am opposed to removing the fire sprinkler requirement from the IRC and I support having the requirement be statewide.

As an educator, I often talk to people about how to be safe in their homes. Home is where people should feel most safe, yet in 2008, 83% of civilian fire deaths and 79% of civilian fire injuries occurred in home fires according to the National Fire Protection Association. The major cause of home fires and also the major cause of civilian injuries is unattended cooking. The majority of those injuries occurred when people tried to fight the fire themselves.

The truth is, your home is the most dangerous place to be with respect to fire.

There have been improvements in fire death rates from several different approaches. Better equipment, better training, public education and awareness programs, lifestyle changes, and fire-safe cigarettes, have made a significant impact. But the most significant weapon in fighting fire death has been the smoke alarm.

In the 1960s, the average U.S. citizen had never heard of a smoke alarm; now, they are commonplace. The smoke alarm technology has developed over time to include a wide range of residential smoke alarms available to homeowners. As technologically advanced as the smoke alarm has become, there is one very important thing that a smoke alarm will never do – extinguish the fire.

Fire sprinklers are designed to take immediate action to extinguish a fire when the heat from that fire reaches the sprinkler head. Most fires

are extinguished by the activation of a single sprinkler head, reducing heat, flames and smoke which allows occupants time to escape the fire.

Each individual sprinkler is designed and calibrated to activate when it senses a significant heat change. It does not operate in response to smoke, burned toast, cooking vapors, steam, or the sound of a smoke alarm. Smoke alarms do what their name implies. They provide early detection and warning of the fire.

If you have a fire in your home, your risk of dying decreases by about 80 percent when sprinklers are present. Everyone agrees that smoke alarm usage must be maintained. But to achieve further meaningful progress in fire protection and safety, we also need an additional intervention. That intervention is the installation of residential fire sprinklers.

In the automobile industry, airbags were first introduced in the 1970's when seatbelt usage across the country was very low. The airbags were first thought to serve as a replacement to seatbelts. But further studies showed that the most significant reduction in deaths and injuries in our nation's automobiles occurred when seatbelts and airbags were used together. In most automobiles today, they are referred to as Supplemental Restraint Systems because they supplement the use of seatbelts. Driver's side and front passenger airbags are standard equipment on all new cars sold in the U.S. today.

The requirement of sprinklers in one and two family dwellings together with the existing requirements of smoke alarms will absolutely result in a reduction of our nation's death and injury rates by providing the early warning system needed for occupant evacuation as well as the early action to extinguish the fire. This fact is indisputable – Fire Sprinklers Save Lives!